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Economics, Work, and Human Values: New Philosophies of Productivity

**Hazel Henderson
Werner Erhard
Ian Mitroff
Peter Senge**

**Commentary by:
Peter Drucker
Robert Reich
J. M. Juran**

**Special Map Insert:
"Work In The 20th Century"**

Werner Erhard on Transformation and Productivity: An Interview

Norman Bodek

Do our current paradigms strangle our productive capacity?

In 1971, Werner Erhard developed The est Training, an approach to individual and social transformation in which over 460,000 individuals have participated over the last thirteen years. He is the founder of Werner Erhard and Associates, which sponsors, in addition to the Training, workshops and seminars on communication, language, and productivity in the United States, Canada, South America, Western Europe, Australia, Israel, and India. He has formed a number of partnerships to apply his method of inquiry to business, education, government, and the health profession, including The Center for Contextual Study (psychotherapy), Transformational Technologies (management and leadership), and Hermet Inc. (language and computers).

Because much of Mr. Erhard's recent work has focused on transformation in corporations and because his influence has been so broad, we asked our guest editor, Norman Bodek, to interview him in his San Francisco office. What follows is a discussion not only of transformation in the workplace, but of the art and discipline of transformation itself.

Bodek: What do you mean by your use of the word "transformation"?

Erhard: We use the word "transformation" to name a distinct discipline. Just as psychology, sociology, and philosophy are disciplines, so too we see transformation as a distinct discipline, a body of knowledge, a field of exploration. I should add that because the discipline of transformation is brand new, it's likely to be misunderstood—something that happens to a lot of new disciplines. At the beginning of the study of cybernetics, for example, people didn't know what cybernetics was. They assumed it was a branch of engineering or mathematics. People tried to grasp it in terms already familiar to them. Eventually, however, it became clear that interpreting cybernetics as a branch of anything actually missed the whole point of cybernetics.

From our perspective, the same situation is now true of transformation. Most people attempt to understand our work in terms of psychology, philosophy, sociology, or theology. While it is true that almost anything can be analyzed from those perspectives, none of those disciplines is our work. Each can provide a certain perspective on our work, but none of them *is* the work.

Fundamentally, transformation is a discipline which explores the nature of Being. Less fundamentally, but still pretty accurately, we would say it is a discipline devoted to possibility and to accomplishment—in the sense of the source of accomplishment.

Bodek: Does a "discipline of Being" focus on working in the moment?

Erhard: Not exactly. To grasp this usefully, we have to put aside a lot of notions we've come to take for granted—particularly the jargon of the '70s—terms like "the now," "the moment," "enlightenment," and the like. Once you've come to grips with the abstractions which those terms represent, of course, they are useful; but without grasping the abstraction, the terms can be misleading. The same can be said, by the way, about any of the terms I'm using.

I'd put it something like this: a "discipline of Being" begins with a commitment to distinguishing what is actually *present*.

Let me give you an example. One of our clients asked us to work with their executives on the issue of leadership. In their own work, they had become promoters of leadership, and even sponsored courses on it. The first question we asked was, "O.K., we know that it's possible to talk about 'leadership' and to work on 'leadership,' but have you noticed

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that when you are dealing with leadership, you are dealing with a phenomenon that is never present? That is, when one says, 'Mr. X is leading,' have you noticed that at the moment that one says it, there is no leadership actually present? You can look in every corner of the room, even inside Mr. X's head, everywhere, and nowhere will you find leadership. You attribute leadership to him, yes, but nowhere can you find it."

If you follow this line of questioning and keep asking the question without hastening too quickly to get an answer, you find out some very interesting things about the phenomenon of leadership *and* about a lot of other phenomena as well. In fact, you will eventually have to come to grips with the notion of Being.

I've had the opportunity and the privilege to count some great men and women among my friends. They all have the same problem: they cannot get their students to be masters as they are—even students with all the intellectual equipment you can imagine. I tell them that the reason why they can't turn their students into masters is that they are fibbing to themselves about the source of their own mastery. They attribute their own mastery to everything other than its actual source: creation. Creating and Being exist in the same domain. And there is a discipline to Being, to creation. The domain of Being has its own rigor; Being is approachable, it is masterable; it's not nebulous.

Imagine someone who wants to be a great manager. In the normal course of events, such a man or woman would start off by, let's say, studying management—perhaps in school, in books, or as an apprentice. Eventually, he or she would collect all the things that great managers have—degrees, credentials, diplomas, great track records, and great biographies. Then, at that point, we say, "Well, Mr. or Ms. X is a *great* manager!" Later, we send our children to the same schools so that they can become great managers too.

Except, most of the children who go to those schools never do become great managers. And we explain that failure on the basis of genes, environment, intelligence, opportunity, and the like. It never occurs to us that our template for becoming a great manager, or, more accurately, for becoming a great *anything*, is backwards. Never do we consider that what makes a great manager is NOT the school, books, or education, but simply BEING a great manager.

Now, I know that statement looks absurd at first, but it's a very interesting possibility. If you discipline yourself to look for what's present, for what is occurring in the moment, then you can ask yourself, "When

someone is being a great manager, what is present?" What's present (and *all* that is present, really) is *being a great manager*. What produces greatness, at the moment when greatness shows up, is being great, period. All the credentials follow from that, not the reverse.

Most people to whom I talk think, "Hey, great! That means I don't have to go to college!" That's not what it means. All the learning, apprenticing, practicing, and thinking is still necessary. My point is not that those practices aren't necessary; my point is that when greatness does show up, none of those practices is the *source* of it. They do provide the conditions for it, but none are the source of the greatness itself. The source is, very simply, Being great. The question we are concerned with in our work is, How does one master this domain of Being?

So, I apologize for a very long answer to a very short question, but it hit right at the heart of our work—that of exploring, investigating, and making available what it means to *be* anything.

Bodek: Would you say the difficulty that limits our ability to master "Being" is something we call "mind"?

Erhard: Yes, in a very shorthand way, we'd say that. But we think it's more technically accurate to say that what blocks our ability to appreciate the phenomenon of Being is that we do not ordinarily distinguish the action of "thinking" from that of "Being." Again, this is a very fundamental question, and one on which we've done a great deal of work.



Realizing the possibility of transformation will not replace "thinking" any more than the fish walking up on land replaced marine life.

The difficulty is never with the mind itself, but rather with our unexamined notions of mind. We talk about the mind, for example, as if it actually *were* something, that is, as if it were some *thing* located in time and taking up space. Now, clearly this is a superstition. No one ever has seen or ever will see a mind. There simply is no such thing. "Mind" exists almost entirely as an "explanatory principle," to use Bateson's words.

Now all that is fine until you want to deal with Being. To deal with the phenomenon of Being, you must come to grips with your unexamined notions of "mind," and, I'm afraid, do some serious reexamination of almost everything that's ever been said about "mind."

Bodek: How successful have you been with that?

Erhard: We've been remarkably successful. Almost a half million people have participated in the Training alone. Another couple of hundred thousand have participated in our other workshops, and probably several hundreds of thousands have participated in day-long workshops addressing the same issues.

The research that's been done shows pretty clearly that in the Training, a breakthrough occurs in which a person is no longer automatically displaced by the lack of distinction between self and mind.

By the way, I'm not saying that the mind is bad or something to be avoided. The Training does not dismiss, suppress or alter the mind. It allows people to *distinguish* the mind—to see it for what it is and isn't. In distinguishing the mind, in becoming aware of it *as the mind*, so to speak, the "ghost," the "superstition" of the mind loses its hold as a phenomenon of interference. One's mind becomes a useful tool: it is the same as it always was, except now there is the distinction, "you," and the distinction, "mind." One leaves the Training *having* a mind, not *being* a mind.

In short, what happens in our work is that this "mind" of which you spoke shows up as a distinction along with another distinction—that of Self or Being.

Just bringing forth such a distinction, by the way, is all that is necessary to ac-

complish the outcome. One needn't change the mind, alter it, suppress it, or manipulate it. Each of us has the capacity to create abstractly, to create distinctions. Most of us have let the ability atrophy. In the Training, our ability to look at things abstractly is rehabilitated, and in the discipline of the Training, distinguishing the mind from oneself ends up coming pretty easily to most people.

Bodek: But isn't seeing the mind as a distinction only the beginning? In other words, doesn't making that distinction remove the blocks at one level—the level where the mind is all-powerful—raise the individual up to a new level, then leave him/her to deal with the blocks at the new level alone?

Erhard: Let me try to answer that with an analogy. Imagine the oceans as an evolutionary space. We start out with a bit of protoplasm in a tropical, primeval sea. We then add eons and eons of time. Eventually life will appear. Then, after more time, life will fill the whole sea—from top to bottom. After enough time, whatever possibilities existed for evolution in the sea will get used up. Evolution in the sea may continue, but it produces weird variations on possibilities already tried. The whole possibility of "evolution in the sea" eventually becomes saturated.

Then, out of nowhere, a fish walks up on the land. Suddenly, at that moment, a whole new domain of possibility for evolution appears. At the very instant when the fish walks up on land, elephants and eagles come into existence—not as realities, but as possibilities. It is not that they are inevitable, but they are possible. For elephants and eagles to appear *physically*, evolution must begin again its long series of trials, wins, and losses. Thus when the fish walks up on land, the character of evolution does not change, but the space of possibility in which evolution occurs is entirely new; what is possible *through* evolution is completely altered.

I think the analogy answers your question. Usually, we think of possibility as options. While this is in some sense true, possibility also exists on a deeper level of abstraction—a level which actually defines which options are permissible. So, to bring forth possibility is to bring forth a domain in which new options become possible. It is not simply finding new options within the same range of options; it actually produces whole new ranges of options. It is actually the bringing forth of possibility itself. It is a distinctly human act, far more human than simply choosing between the options with which one is presented. It is the act of bringing forth whole ranges of options, options with which you were not presented and yet

which you caused to be.

In our work, we associate this deeper notion of possibility with creativity. Possibility shows up as an act of creation, as bringing forth. This also exists only in the domain of Being.

At its heart, our work is the opening up, the bringing forth of a new domain of possibility for people. To answer your question directly, it is like the fish walking up on land. Realizing the possibility of transformation will not replace "thinking" any more than the fish walking up on land replaced or diminished marine life. What we intend that our work will do is to empower, facilitate, and enable people to bring forth a new domain of possibility through which they will evolve on their own. Our work does not bring people to the end of that possibility, but we intend that it bring them into a new possibility. So the work is a beginning rather than an end, and it's true that people will come to new blocks in this "new space of possibility." Time takes care of that, however.

This analogy, by the way, can give you some insight into what we mean by transformation. Transformation is not merely adding something to what we've already got. It is a phenomenon unto itself. The fish that walked up on land was not just a different kind of fish; it was in fact, no longer a fish. Now, certainly most of us would argue with that. We would like to talk about that thing on the land as if it *were* a fish. After all, it looks like a fish; it came out of the water, and one *can* even make a strong historical argument that it was once a fish. However, none of these arguments allows for the possibility of transformation—the phenomenon of the fish is a wholly different one. In fact, when one allows for the possibility of transformation, a lot of phenomena look wholly different.

Bodek: Let's begin to tie this into productivity and organizational behavior. I understand you're offering programs for organizations. What is the reason for not keeping the work targeted to individuals?

Erhard: The commitment we had at the beginning was to make the work available to individuals. We hoped that individuals who found value in the work would express that benefit in their lives. We expected that if that did happen, the value of the work would eventually show up in people's work lives. As it turns out, all of that has happened pretty much the way we envisioned it at the beginning. Studies done on people's participation after the Training show that their participation enhances their ability and effectiveness in their organizations and in their work.

As time went on, and as more people

began realizing the benefits of this work in their own work, there came to be a greater demand for us to bring the work not only to individuals, but to groups of people in organizational settings as well. So, to answer your question, the principal reason for not keeping the work targeted to individuals is that the demand to do it in organizations has required a full-scale commitment on our part.

We've been working with corporations and government organizations bringing the power of transformation not only to the people in the organizations but to the organizations themselves. We've just started a full-scale program, and we expect by the end of this year or the beginning of next year for it to be in full swing. Our pilot programs have shown that our work can make a real difference in organizational effectiveness and productivity, so we are encouraged to expand now vigorously.

Bodek: How would you apply what we've been discussing about the "space of possibility" to individuals in organizations to enhance their productivity?

Erhard: The first issue to come to grips with is that most of our notions about being productive and successful, come from a set of assumptions which, for the most part, we never examine or question. We bring these assumptions to the table with us as given. They are so much a part of who we are that it is difficult for us to separate ourselves from them enough to be able to talk about them. We do not *think* these assumptions, we think *from* them.

So, for example, our unexamined assumptions about what a human being is are very closely tied to our notions of productivity. Similarly, our assumptions about how the physical universe works are very closely tied to our ability to produce. For example, in any set of circumstances, what about human action really produces impact? Is it behavior? Is it words that produce impact? Is the physical universe really like a set of billiard balls such that moving the right ball at the right time produces impact? Or is there more to it than that? Maybe you *are* already moving the right ball at the right time, but it just isn't making any difference. Does being productive depend on the wisdom of one's analysis of the situation, or are there great analysts who have no impact?

We are not necessarily aware that we have settled on answers to these questions, but they are there within each of us, already determining what we see as possible, as achievable. They are already determining how we think, manage, talk, and act.

So, if you will permit me to refer to this already present set of assumptions as a paradigm, then one of the first steps to take

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in working with people on the issue of productivity is to examine the paradigm they already are. Why is this step important? Because you and I are much more likely to fulfill the paradigm we are than to fulfill any of our goals, ideas, or visions. *Our New Year's resolutions, our plans, and our strategies are never as powerful in determining our actions as our paradigms are.*

It's worth going into this a little more deeply for a moment. The possibility you are is confined by the paradigm you are to the degree that you do not distinguish between the two. All those unexamined assumptions that are driving your actions, behaviors, and assessments—to the degree that you think you *are* all that, to that same degree, you limit yourself.

Put more abstractly, the situation is very much like what we spoke of earlier with respect to the mind; there are at least *two* domains—one, the domain of Being, and two, the domain in which all those unexamined assumptions live. Those are in fact two distinct domains. The rules of operating in one are entirely different from the rules of operating in the other. Who you are lives in the domain of Being; that is, your ability to bring forth, to intervene into circumstances, to create possibility and to make happen what you intend, lives in the domain of Being. That domain is one of mastery, of power, of accomplishment.

Alternatively, there is the domain of unexamined assumptions. Inherently, there is no power in this second domain. But when you fail to distinguish it, when you allow the two domains to collapse into one another and are unaware of your "Self" as generative Being, the paradigm has a force. Not power, but force. The paradigm, not you, drives, runs, and determines outcomes of your actions because you fail to distinguish it from who you are.

So, the first step is to come to grips with the paradigm that one already is so that one can see its impact on one's performance, productivity, and actions. That alone is remarkably revealing for organizations as well as for individuals. People suddenly see clearly why what they have been trying to accomplish could never be accomplished within the limitations of their current

paradigm. They suddenly see that no matter how hard they would have worked or planned, no matter how effective their tools were or how much help they could have mustered, what they wanted to produce just wasn't possible within their operative paradigm. To see all this is remarkably revealing, but to see it is only step one. Step two is to ask, "What is the nature of a paradigm?", which will in turn lead to step three, "What is the paradigm that would be natural to my intentions?"

If you can begin to grasp what I'm driving at here, then you'll begin to reassess a lot of the "conventional wisdom" about productivity. For example, for the most part we assume that productivity has a lot to do with a person's attitude. Naturally, then, a lot of productivity-enhancing techniques focus on changing attitudes, improving attitudes, and motivating people. Now, undoubtedly there is a lot of benefit in that kind of work. But by the same token, some people with very positive attitudes generate grand schemes out of which nothing comes, and some people with petty attitudes can still produce miracles. We would say, rather than changing your attitude, how about learning something about Being? How about a shift in Being? Because if you shift Being, attitudes will shift by themselves.

Bodek: There are two distinctions I'd like to ask about. First, does a "shift in Being" bring about a new paradigm or does it get rid of paradigms altogether? Second, is a new paradigm the same as a new "domain of possibility?"

Erhard: Clearly, the term "shift in Being" is only a verbal approximation of the phenomenon. The term is intended to point at something rather than represent it accurately. Other ways of talking about the phenomenon are easier to understand but are also, because of their understandability, more of a trap. So, let me answer as directly as I can.

A shift in Being occurs when one distinguishes oneself from whatever one previously considered oneself to be. Such moments are usually accompanied by a sense of insight—not the insight of a new conclusion and not a psychological insight, but an ontological insight, an insight at the level of who one is. The insight is not necessarily verbalized, but often shows up as a distinct or expanded experience of oneself.

A shift in Being does not get rid of paradigms. Paradigms, ways of thinking, are obviously useful and necessary. What occurs when one recognizes one's own Being, or, let me say, when one comes to terms with Being as a valid phenomenon, is that paradigms simply stop defining who

we are. It's not that you escape thinking; you escape thinking automatically, reflexively, irresponsibly. Once you've made the distinction between what you *think* and who you *are*, what you think becomes a *function* of who you are and not simply of what there is to be thought. Original, true thinking occurs only in this generative domain of Being. Einstein, as far as I can tell, created relativity. He certainly did not deduce it, since it wasn't deducible from anything previously known about physics.

So, you could say that from Being, one creates paradigms. As far as I can tell, that is a legitimate statement to make.

To answer your second question, I prefer to say that a new paradigm allows for a new range of options. The options permissible within a paradigm come along with the paradigm; in fact, one could say they define it. But options inherent in a new paradigm are not what I mean by possibility. What I mean by possibility is more closely related to where paradigms themselves come from. New paradigms are not accidents of nature. They are brought forth, created, generated. They are generated first as possibility. Nothing comes into being unless there is first the *possibility* of its being.

Bodek: Could we look at a concrete example? For example, let's say I have a writer whose job is to articulate a theory our company is working on, yet who is unable to do it, not because of lack of intelligence or capacity, but because we're not getting the idea across to him. He can't be productive because he simply can't *get* what we're talking about. He is willing, let's say, but frustrated. His lack of productivity is not his fault. If I understand the theory, how can I get it across to him according to your ideas about "space of possibility"?

Erhard: That is a good example. It's just the kind of problem we try to address with our work, since to produce an enduring result requires transformation. Presumably you'd be interested not simply in getting one communication across to this fellow, but in generating some insight into the whole issue of ineffective communication.

I think we can agree that until this person gets the idea for himself, he won't be able to produce what you want. He might repeat your words or do a good editing job, but he won't be generating it, creating it. Your question, as I hear it, is, How can what I'm talking about have an impact such that this fellow creates it for himself?

First, we need to understand that whatever we want this man to grasp, the idea, the theory, or the communication, *lives* someplace. I'm going to call where it lives "languageing." Now when I say that, I don't mean that it lives in words. He has heard

the words, and that hasn't helped. And certainly, what you want him to grasp doesn't live as a thing. If it did, you could just take it and put it in his hand. So, the question about where this communication lives is a critical one and to answer it takes some deep looking. But let's just say for the moment that whatever it is you want this fellow to create for himself lives in this strange place called "languageing."

A critical issue in the notion of languageing is a person's "listening." By "listening," I don't mean what your ear does. That is a purely physical phenomenon: your ear picks up sound and transmits it to your brain in the form of an electrochemical impulse. The way I mean it, "listening" determines what can show up for you, what can presence itself to you in conversation and in action.

Let me give you an example. A novice goes out on a tennis court. The coach instructs him to hold the racquet and his body in a certain way, and to swing at the ball in a certain way. This student tries to do it, but he can't. Furthermore, he doesn't even know that he's not doing it.

I assert that the novice's actions on the tennis court, or of this fellow in your example, are not a function of the instructions he's been given, nor of his mental processes, nor of his will—but of his *observations*. His actions on the tennis court are more powerfully determined by what he observes, by what shows up for him—and I don't mean what his eyes transmit to his brain.

Bodek: Could we use the word "perception"?

Erhard: I very definitely don't mean perception. What "shows up" for people is not determined by what's there to be seen. A competent tennis player sees the ball as moving slowly. For a novice, the ball shows up as moving very rapidly. In both cases, however, the measured velocity of the ball may be exactly the same, and although the ball is moving at the same speed in both cases, nevertheless, what the expert "observes" and what the novice "observes" are entirely different.

This is what I mean by "show up." Once you grasp what I'm talking about, you can see that the notion of "showing up" redefines your whole question about the writer. See, if you are trying to get this fellow to create something for himself within a paradigm that says that what he sees and hears is a function of what's there, then you are doomed to keep trying to have him "get it" by forcing things into his head—words, explanations, repeating it over and over, screaming at him, threatening him with being fired, calling him names, motivating

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him, and, when all else fails, changing his attitude. Those are the tools we use when we work in a reality that doesn't allow for the possibility that one, this thing you want him to get lives in languaging, two, that a large part of languaging depends on the phenomenon of listening, and three, that one's listening actually helps to determine what can "show up."

So to restate the example you gave from a different perspective, it's not that this fellow can't hear what you're saying, or that he doesn't understand or care. It's that his "listening," his paradigm, allows for only certain possibilities. Ideas and communications which fall within his structure of listening can be recreated, "gotten," by him. Those which fall outside his structure of listening cannot be recreated or gotten. It's not that he doesn't *want* to recreate them, by the way; it's just that they're not allowed. And, he can't do much about it because he doesn't see himself as a structure of listening—as a space of possibility. Perhaps he sees himself as a receptacle for words or as a brain at the end of an ear—who knows?—but he does not see himself as being able to work with his own listening. If he did, he'd see possibilities where there were none before. He will struggle to get it just as hard as you will struggle to give it to him, and in all that struggling, no communication will occur.

So, in your example, there are two things the man hasn't listened to. One, he hasn't listened to the creative communication which you are trying to give him, and two, he hasn't listened to his own listening.

What is required to communicate successfully with this man is a transformation—a shift in his structure of listening or in the possibility which lives in his listening. He can't get what you're saying because it doesn't live as a possibility in his listening. Therefore, it can't show up in his listening, and it will never show up as what you are talking about because of his "structure of listening."

This phenomenon is not psychological. "What" he is listening, what shows up for him, is not a function of his psychology. It's not that he has a bad attitude, or is badly educated or somehow disturbed, dis-

tracted, or sick. Now, there is a body of problems for which psychology works, but there is also one for which psychology doesn't work. We're interested in the phenomenon of being human from a definitely non-psychological perspective. If we had to name the perspective from which we are interested in being human, we'd have to call it, at least at this point, *ontological*.

To bring about the transformation needed so this fellow can "get" what you are trying to convey, you need to do ontological work, not psychological work. You have to open up in him the possibility for what you want to communicate to exist in him—as a creation. By the way, this notion of "creation" is a critical point. Your experience lives in you as a creation, not as an understanding. You may *also* understand your experience, but that understanding is entirely unrelated to the experience itself and to the fact that you create experience. Creating an experience is a function of possibility, not of understanding.

Explaining everything to this man as clearly as you can will not help him create the experience; it may provide the conditions in which he can create the experience, but it does not help him actually create it. What allows him to create the experience is a structure of interpretation in which this particular experience is possible, allowable, observable. Once the experience can live as a possibility in him, he can create it, and not before.

If he is not creating your communication, assuming he is willing to, it is because what he needs to create is not possible in his listening. You have to open up in him the possibility for what you want him to get. To do that, you need to shift your locus of concern from what you are trying to tell him to what he is listening, to what he is able to observe, to what "shows up" for him.

To go back to the tennis example for a moment, if you've got a good tennis teacher and she has some grasp of what I'm talking about, she will not tell you how to swing the racquet or how to stand or where to move. She'll tell you what to observe. By virtue of her talking to you in that way, what can show up for you shifts. As that shifts, your actions shift. In other words, shifting what is possible to show up for you also creates a new domain of possible actions that didn't exist for you before. A good tennis coach never needs to tell you what to do. She will alter what is possible for you to observe, and you will do naturally what is consistent with what you are observing.

In the example of your company's employee, rather than trying to get him to understand what you're saying—a task at which I suspect you'll never fully succeed—

Each of us has the capacity to create abstractly, to create distinctions, but most of us have let the ability atrophy.

you can give him a new "domain of distinction," an ability to distinguish that which was not before distinguishable. In that new domain, he can create for himself the thing you are trying to convey to him.

Perhaps a more familiar example is the example of the primitive tribesman. Anthropologists tell us that if you show a photograph to a primitive tribesman, he sees no image. He sees black and white spots. Now when the anthropologist explains photography to the tribesman, the tribesman looks a little quizzically at the anthropologist and says, "I still see only black and white spots. I understand that you are telling me it could represent an image, but so could this stone on the ground. I don't see any image."

Now, the image is there, of course; it just doesn't show up for the tribesman. What's missing for the primitive tribesman is the abstraction, the domain of distinction in which photographic image can show up. You can explain the image until doomsday, and he is never going to see an image by virtue of your explanation alone. The image will never show up for him as an image until he brings forth the possibility of photographic images. This means he must create the distinction, "photographic image." The instant that the possibility of "photographic image" lives for him, the instant he is the distinction, he'll see the photograph.

This relationship between creating and experiencing is a critically important point, because it is so easily missed. It happens so rapidly, that we can even miss it in our own everyday experience. Understanding or explaining photography, showing the tribesman the photograph, grappling over the issue with him, are all important to cognition. They provide the condition in which he can create the experience of the photographic image. But none of those is the *source* of the experience. The source of the experience is his creation of it at the instant that he has the experience. Experience is creative in nature; it is not induced by circumstances.

Bodek: You're saying that it can come without his experiencing that image?

Erhard: I am saying that the possibility of

seeing the image is not derived from the experience. Rather, the experience is derived from the possibility. The experience is not derived from the concept of or the explanation of or the definition of a photographic image. None of those gives rise to the experience "photographic image." Rather the experience and even the concept are derived from this other domain where one creates distinctions and possibility. When you can communicate the domain of distinction "photographic image," then instantly the experience "photographic image" shows up. Experience shows up in domains of distinction. This is the critical breakthrough in our work.

Bodek: This domain you're talking about is a function of Being?

Erhard: This phenomenon I'm trying to get at is in the domain of Being. Creating distinctions—not naming or explaining distinctions but *creating* distinctions—is a phenomenon in the domain of Being.

Let me give you one more example. Let's say you study all the books there are about balance. Then you go out and sit on a bicycle, but you fall off. You know everything there is to know about balance, but you fall off the bicycle because the ability to balance on a bike is not really predicated on what we think of as information or knowledge. That is to say ability, skill, and prowess are not epistemological phenomena—not phenomena of knowledge or information.

Now, we observe that if you take someone out on a bike, and he sits on it and falls off enough times, then at some point he'll sit on it and balance. So, we then say to ourselves, "Ah, the answer is not knowledge, but experience!" I say that too is a misinterpretation. I say that if you use that interpretation in working with people, you're going to be very frustrated. I think that what happens when someone learns balance is that he sits on a bike, falls off, sits on it, falls off, until at some point, out of all that experience, he brings forth the distinction of "balance." And in that distinction, or in that "domain of possibility," he can now discern balance from not-balance. He'll still fall off some more, but he's now over the hump. The possibility of balance is present because he's had that breakthrough. He now has a domain of distinction called balance, in which the experience "balance" can show up.

There is a transcending of the ordinary rules here. The ordinary rules are: you learn a little bit, then you learn a little bit more, then more, and finally you know enough to do it. I'm saying that there is a whole body of problems or concerns for which that theory does not work. For that body of problems, the solution is an all-of-a-sudden

phenomenon—an “ah-haa” experience. We don’t understand it very well because we try to get at it with disciplines which cannot contain it. Our work proposes a discipline directed at those phenomena, and we think we now know something about the content of that discipline. We now know that the “ah-haa” is a product of bringing forth a domain of distinction, literally creating it. It’s as if you know you don’t have to go through that process one step at a time—you’ve got it all at the moment of bringing forth the distinction. It now lives for you as a possibility. It’s true that you’ll have to go through the practice and add the steps in, but you’re adding the steps into the possibility, not trying to build towards the possibility.

This technology of breakthrough is distinction-creating, or paradigm-creating, or context-creating. The traditional disciplines can say something about it, but they have no power to bring it about. Bringing it about requires a whole different discipline. It is talked about in religion, psychology, and philosophy. But it’s *talked* about rather than brought forth. You can read books from now until doomsday on creativity and only associate with creative people, and you’re still not likely to be much more creative than when you started. It requires a whole new discipline to be creative. And that’s the discipline we’re talking about.

With regard to your company’s employee—what’s missing for him is not information, understanding, or definition, but a distinction. If you discover the distinction, which is what *your* job is, and you communicate it to him so that he can bring it forth, suddenly he will understand what you’ve been trying to say. Our work is about training people in this domain of creating distinctions, bringing forth paradigms.

If there is a transformation, a domain of

distinction brought forth, it will not show up for you except in action, in deeds. In other words, if I were giving you a new concept, you would be able to understand it intellectually. But if I’ve communicated a distinction, you will not know you got the distinction except that a new “space of possibility” will show up in your actions. The only way to know whether I’ve succeeded in communicating with you about this issue—this problem of the writer—is to look at your interactions with that man a few months down the road.

In the meantime, you might ask yourself, “How do I *be* the guy who gets through to this employee?” You can shift who you are by shifting your commitment from having an answer to living in the question. Right now, in your interactions with the writer, you are probably listening for answers. Americans generally listen for answers; I’m asking you to listen questions. Live in the question—who do I have to be to get through to this man? By nothing more than taking the stand that you are the question—How do I get through to him?—the rest will take care of itself. Naturally, you’ve got to talk to him, work on the problem—all that’s true. But by living the question, rather than by living the answer, you have a shift in Being that allows you to show up as a person who gets through to him.

I know that sounds too simple; that it ought to be more complex. But that’s really just the point. When you’ve dealt with all this stuff successfully and engaged in it authentically, you don’t walk away with a whole bunch of new rules to follow and practices to figure out. In fact, you may even feel a little confused, uncertain about what to do, still looking for the rules. As far as I’m concerned, that’s the best possible place to be in order to bring something forth. If that happens, your time was well spent.